Philosophy, Literature, and the Dissolution of the Subject

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this dissertation is to consider one aspect of the debate over the limits of philosophy, namely the claims of literature to be able to convey in detail what philosophy can only provide in general terms. Its more specific purpose is to demonstrate the ways in which the novel contains a richer account of the nature of ethical experience. Its methodology is one that treats literature not as a source of ‘illustrations’ of philosophical themes, but as an activity that has its own claims to make. The project focuses on the ideas about language, experience and ethics contained in the philosophy of Nietzsche, and the way in which these themes are worked out but extended in the writings of Robert Musil and the Turkish novelist Oğuz Atay.

The thesis will focus on one main theme, namely the idea of the dissolution of the subject. It will then ask the following questions: what remains of the human being when he or she is stripped of his/her ‘qualities’ (Musil)? What forms of experience are still possible? Does the dissolution of the subject entail the dissolution of language? Does it bring freedom or a state of disconnection (Atay)? If the former, what forms of ethics does this freedom make possible? Or is this freedom ultimately unbearable for human beings? It will seek to demonstrate that literature is better able than philosophy to answer these questions.
# Table of Contents

**Introduction**

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Chapter I: Nietzsche on the Self and Morality

I.i. Introduction

I.ii. Nietzsche: The Self and the Christian Morality

I.iii. Nietzsche’s Critique of Kant

I.iv. Nietzsche and Spinoza: Free Will and Freedom

I.v. Conclusion

---

Chapter II: Nietzsche’s Remedy

II.i. Introduction

II.ii. Nietzsche and Stoicism; the ‘Care of the Self’; A Modest Egoism

II.iii. The Sovereign Individual; Amor Fati; Eternal Return

II.iv. Conclusion

---

Chapter III: Intermediate Reflections; Philosophy and Literature

---

Chapter IV: Musil on Epistemology, Culture and the Self

IV.i. Introduction

IV.ii. The Reception of Nietzsche in German-speaking World and Lebensphilosophie

IV.iii. The Epistemological Background: Cause-effect

IV.iv. The Critique of Rationality; the Sense of Possibility

IV.v. Culture and the Individual

IV.vi. Conclusion

---

Chapter V: Musil on Ethics

V.i. Introduction

V.ii. Subjectivity, Free Will, Responsibility
V.iii. Essayism..............................................................................................................142

V.iv. Ulrich’s Company of Women..............................................................................155

V.v. The Other Condition and Ethics..........................................................................158

V.vi. Conclusion: Ulrich Returns to the Parallel Campaign........................................174

Chapter VI: Intermediate Reflections II: Metaphor, Irony and Simile..................176

Chapter VII: Atay on History and Authority..............................................................187

VII.i. Introduction.......................................................................................................187

VII.ii. History: ‘Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow’..........................................................190

VII.iii. ‘Words, words, words’: Excess of Words......................................................203

VII.iv. Fathers and Sons: Authority and Bureaucracy.................................................212

VII.v. Comedy, Irony and the Subject........................................................................217

VII.vi. Conclusion.......................................................................................................223

Chapter VIII: Atay on the Self..................................................................................225

VIII.i. Introduction.....................................................................................................225

VIII.ii. The Self..........................................................................................................225

VIII.iii. The Double...................................................................................................233

VIII.iv. Intertextuality and the Dissolution of the Subject.........................................239

VIII.v. The Originality Paradox................................................................................250

VIII.vi. Originality: The Act of Reading.................................................................265

VIII.vii. Conclusion..................................................................................................270

Conclusion.............................................................................................................271

Bibliography............................................................................................................277